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AUTHOR Duker, Laurie, Ed.
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ABSTRACT

Minimal federal regulations on firearm sales have facilitated the proliferation of guns, gun owners, and gun dealers in the United States. This fact sheet offers data on the growing number of firearm dealers, the relative ease of obtaining and keeping a license to sell guns from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the lack of safety standards and effective gun control legislation, and the number of new guns being produced. Also provided is a brief description of the Brady law and its immediate effectiveness. (RB)

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Firearm Facts

GUN SALES

A federal license to sell firearms is easy to get and rarely taken away. Minimal federal regulations on firearm sales have facilitated the proliferation of guns, gun owners, and gun dealers. In the second half of the twentieth century, the rising firearms availability rate has roughly paralleled the rising firearms homicide and suicide rates.[1]

From 1975–1991, the number of licensed firearms dealers increased by over 95,000.[2]

In 1994, over 255,000 Americans were licensed to sell guns by the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF).[3]
Potential gun dealers fill out a two-page form which asks about their age, citizenship, criminal record, and mental health. A three-year license costs only $200. Dealers can order firearms through the mail and sell them to the public.

In 1991, nearly 92,000 Americans applied to get or renew a federal firearms license; only 52 were denied.[3]
According to President Clinton, "In some ways we have made it easier to get a license to sell guns than it is to get and keep a driver's license."[4]

In 1991, the BATF performed compliance inspections on fewer than 4% of all existing dealerships. Although 5,967 violations were found, only 17 dealer's licenses were revoked.[3]
The limited resources and mandate of the BATF enable many firearms dealers to engage in profitable, illegal activities.

Only machine guns, silencers, short-barreled rifles and shotguns, and "destructive devices" (such as bombs and grenades) are required to be registered with the government.
These weapons are registered because Congress declared them dangerous. However, nearly 80% of all gun crimes are committed with ordinary handguns.[5]

In the gun control acts of 1968 and 1989, Congress banned the importation of Saturday night specials and semi-automatic assault weapons, but not their American production.
In the absence of foreign competition, American manufacture of these same weapons has skyrocketed.[6]

American-made guns are not subject to federal safety standards.[7]
Although the Consumer Products Safety Commission's mission is to protect the public from unreasonable risks of injury and death associated with consumer products, it has no authority to regulate firearms.

In 1990, 4,371,000 guns were produced for the American market. That is 12,000 new guns every day.[2]
Gun manufacturers and dealers are rarely held accountable for the damage caused by their guns.

The Brady law requires a national five-day waiting period and background check prior to any gun purchase.
In its first month, the law prevented handgun purchases by at least 1,605 people who were deemed felons or "mentally unfit."[8]

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Children's Safety Network

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Edited by
Laurie Duker, M.P.P.M.
Children's Safety Network at the
National Center for Education in Maternal
and Child Health

Researched and written by
Youth Alive at the Summit Medical Center,
Oakland, CA

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McLean, VA 22102
(703) 821-8955 • fax (703) 821-2098

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